

California



The Appearance of Home

KIZH Nation - Gabilan Band of Mission Indians

The True Meaning of the word “California”

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The name “California” is a unique and well recognized name to most of the world and yet little is known of where it originated. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the origins of the name “California” and trace back its roots to show where and how it developed through history. The Kizh Gabrieleño Tribe, who are the indigenous people of the Los Angeles and Orange County area, have firsthand experience with the importance of accurately defining the origins of names, because in our case, our tribe had to overcome the usage of another name attributed to us. In the development of the names of places or tribes, one can trace how a simple error or misconception can end up impacting, even altering the history of a land or people for centuries to come. To ignore the true meaning behind one's name is a great insult to our culture, and we Kizh only go by Kizh.

Going farther back in time, a close examination of the interaction between the Spanish explorers and the Aztec people shows a clear connection between the two languages that relates to the evolution of the word “California”. Following the logic of Occam’s Razor, and by looking at the well documented history of the exploration of the Americas, one discovers that the merging of the Aztec and Spanish language through cultural intermingling over time is what ultimately led to the development of the now famous word “California”. For example, by going to pre-explorer Aztec times and taking a look at the first syllable of the Spanish word “Calli-forma” (a relevant hybrid word used by the Spanish (see Figure 1), the much older word “calli” is seen in their old war songs as well as in their calendar. The word “calli” itself mostly was incorporated as one of the more basic and essential Aztec words to use for communication between the explorers and the Aztecs, along with other important words such as places, food, water, animals, gold, etc.

C

Ca. 1. And, also. 2. To be.

Ça, Çan, VII, 1. Only, solely.

Cacauantoc, VI, 5. Reduplicated from *caua*, to cease, stop, leave off.

Cacauatla, XI, 2. "Among the cacao trees."

Calli, I, 5, 6. House; *calipan*, in the house.

(Figure 1) RIG VEDA AMERICANUS. SACRED SONGS OF THE ANCIENT MEXICANS, WITH A GLOSS IN NAHUATL. BY. DANIEL G. BRINTON. [1890]

In Figure 1, it can be seen that the word "calli" (house), is also used in a similar Aztec word "calipan" meaning "in the house". The word "calli" could have easily lost the extra "l" as a natural evolution in the usage of the language over time. The second part of the puzzle is to establish from where did the second syllable "fornia" originate? It most likely originated on the Spanish side, specifically from the Latin word "forma" which means "form, shape, or appearance". What was the reason or need that would have required the merging of two words into the one word, "Califorma"? Traditionally, explorers and conquerors have mixed their language with the language of those conquered to make for an easier assimilation of cultures. Cortes himself was knowledgeable in Latin. (See Figure 3) While the word "calli" is unique to the Aztecs in its use in war songs, referring to home and in their calendar, after Cortes conquered the Aztec empire (within two years between 1519-1521), its usage would have been altered and expanded to accommodate the new interaction of cultures. It would have been easier for the Spaniards to incorporate some of the Aztec language into their own communications than to teach the Aztecs an entirely new language, so the more essential Aztec words became commonly used by both parties. A similar pattern of the blending of languages can be seen in the California mission system where both Spanish, Latin and various indigenous languages were blended with an end goal of creating a working cohesion of different cultures.

When the Aztec word “calli” and the Latin word “forma” are blended, the newly minted name “California” is the result. Its meaning based on the definitions of both words suggests “the appearance of home”, a romantic gesture perhaps, for weary travelers and explorers because the beaches of Spain and Baja California are remarkably similar both in terrain and the distinctive turquoise color of their oceans. Hernan Cortes left Spain at the age of 19 in 1504 and went on to discover the new yet quite similar lands and beaches of “California” in 1535. (See Figure 2)



(Figure 2) Baja California beaches (left) and Spain beaches (right).

At the age of fourteen Hernán Cortés is said to have enrolled in the law faculty of the University of Salamanca. Much has been made of his supposed university training, but it is by no means certain that this was not merely a pious fabrication by later chroniclers eager to credit a man who was now a marquis with a respectable ancestry. If Cortés could make no undisputed claim to membership of the military aristocracy, then his supposed training in law made him a fitting candidate for the rising service nobility. Las Casas said that he was a Latin scholar “only because he had studied at Salamanca and was a bachelor of law”, implying, with some justification, that the amount of Latin known to most bache-

6. *Historia de las Indias*, Bk. III, cap. 27.

7. See Federico Gómez de Orozco, “Cual era el linaje paterno de Cortes? ”.

8. Biblioteca Nacional (Madrid), ms. 3020, f. 1r. See below p. lxxiii.

lors of law in sixteenth-century Castile was not very great.⁹ The only evidence he provides for Cortés' Latinity, however, consist merely of the commonplace Biblical quotation, “qui non intrat per ostium fur est et latro” (“he who does not come in by the door is robber and a thief”). The soldier-chronicler, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, who accompanied Cortés to Mexico, also claimed that Cortés was a bachelor of law and that “when he spoke with jurists [*letrados*] and Latin scholars [*hombres latinos*] he replied to what they said in Latin.”¹⁰ It is doubtful that there were many *letrados* or *hombres latinos* amongst Cortés’ somewhat disreputable followers, and Díaz is surely only copying Gómara, from whom he borrowed far more than he was ever prepared to admit. Since the records of student admissions for this period are missing, we shall never know whether Cortés ever went to Salamanca or, if he did, how much he learnt there. The one person, however, who never made any claim to being a Bachelor of Law – and he made claims, many of them exaggerated, to every other one of his accomplishments – was Cortés himself.

Another version of this phase in Cortés’ life is provided by the chronicler Juan Suárez de Peralta, who heard it from his father, who was also Cortés’ brother-in-law.¹¹ In Suárez’s account, Cortés is said to have spent over a year, not in Salamanca, but at a notary’s office in Valladolid, where “he learnt to write and to take notes like a notary which he did very well”. He then set out to make his fortune in the Italian wars, but turned back when he heard of Columbus’s discovery. He travelled to Seville, where he was again employed by a notary for a short while before leaving for Hispaniola. If, as this account suggests, Cortés spent slightly over one year in Spain, and later five or six years in Hispaniola, working for a notary, then this could have provided him with the slight knowledge of Latin which is apparent in his writings. It would also possibly

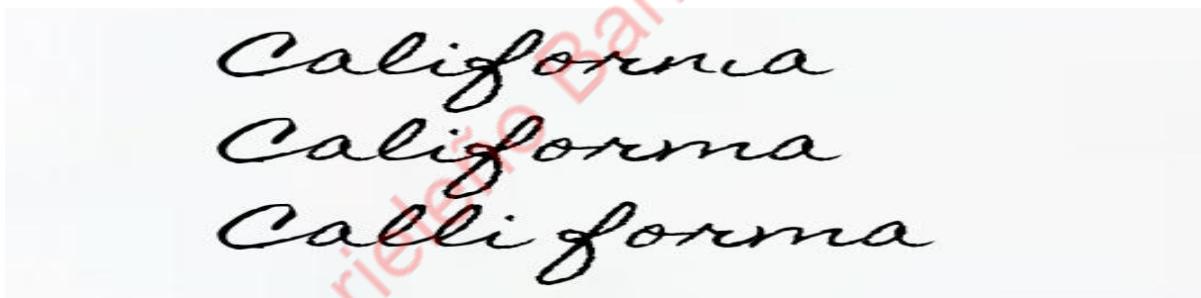
9. *Historia de las Indias*, Bk. III, cap. 16.

10. Bernal Díaz, cap. 204.

11. *Tratado del descubrimiento de las Indias*, p. 30 ff.

(Figure 3) Letters from Mexico
by Hernan Cortes, Anthony Pagden, John Huxtable Elliott · 2001 Cortes learned Latin and Law at the University of Salamanca, Spain.

It is also worth considering that the cursive handwritten form of “California”, could have been changed through the hand copying of documents over time, especially given the complexity of writing in cursive and the potential for human error. An “m” can easily be written as an “ni” and then copied as an “ni” thereafter. (See figure 4) California could have morphed easily into California, as the last variant rolls off of the tongue easily and nicely reflects the natural flow and rhythm which is reflective of the Spanish language.



(Figure 4) Example of cursive writing of California, California and Calliforma.

At that very time, *Thomas Cavendish*, a *Suffolke man*, which two yeeres since was gone out of *England*, with three good Ships was sayling the Sea in another Climate of the World, and hauing past beyond the Streight of *Magellan*, burnt and ransacked in the entry of *Chile*, *Peru*, and *New Spaine*, many Townes of the *Spaniards*, tooke and pillaged neere *Calliforma*, eightene rich Ships loaden, and a sumptuous Ship-Royall of *Spaine*, with infinite riches, returning happily the same yeere into *England* (by *Philippines*, *Molaques*, the *Cape of bona Speranza*, and the famous *Ile of Saint Helen*) with a precious bootie, and memorable glory, as beeing onely the third, who, since *Magellan*, circuited the whole Earth.

As

E T H, *Queene of England, &c.* 223

(Figure 5) *The true and royll history of the famous empresse Elizabeth, queene of England, France and Ireland &c. True faith's defendresse of divine renowne and happy memory. : Wherein all such memorable things as happened during hir blessed raigne, with such acts and treaties as past betwixt Hir Ma.tie and Scotland, France, Spaine, Italy, Germany, Poland, Sweden, Denmark, Russia, and the Netherlands, are exactly described By Camden, William, 1551-1623; Bellegent, Paul de Publication date 1625*



(Figure 6) To the left of New Spain, is Baja California , discovered in 1535 by Hernan Cortes. He would first encounter the Aztec empire in 1519.



(Figure 7) Cosmographey Oder beschreibung Aller Länder herrschaftenn vnd fürnemesten Stetten des ganzen Erdbodens0 sampt jhren Gelegenheiten, Eigenschaften, Religion, Gebrüchen, Geschichten vnnd Handthierungen, etc By Sebastian Münster · Publish 1588 Page 136 One of the earliest Maps of New Spaine, it shows Calliformia as a peninsula.

Peruana consisteth
in these Prouinces,

1	Brasilia.
2	Tifnada.
3	Caribana.
4	Cartagena.
5	Peru.
6	Charcas.
7	Chile.
8	Chicha, and
9	Patagones.

Mexicana
consisteth in
these Pro-
vinces,

1	Nova Hispania.
2	Terra Florida.
3	Nova Albion.
4	Califorma.
5	Norumbega.
6	Nova Francia.
7	Esterillane.

Peruana chiefe Islands

1	Hispaniolas.
2	Cuba, with all the other Islands of the West India.
3	Margarite Insule.
4	Molucque Insule.
5	Remores Insule.
6	Iauamaior.
7	Iauamior.
8	Salomonis Insule.
9	All the other Islands of East India.

Mexicana

(Figure 8) Brief Treatise of the use of the Globe Celestiall and Terrestrial: wherein is set downe the principles of the mathematicks. . By R.T. [i.e. Robert Tanner.] Publish 1620.



(Figure 9) *Mapa Americae Sive Quartae Orbis Partis Nova Et Exactissima Descriptio* by Diego Gutiérrez 1562
Showing California.



The Storming of the Teocalli by Cortes and his troops is an 1848 oil on canvas painting by the German American history painter, Emanuel Leutze. Teocalli meaning "home of god". Teo coming from "Teotl" and Calli meaning "House." Teotl is a word currently being debated over the meaning behind it. Some scholars think it means mysterious. Note there is also a word from Latin-Greek that would fit here. Theo, theo is Latin-Greek for "God".

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California Island myth and California inspired by a novel Las sergas de Esplandián by Garcí Rodríguez de Montalvo. The passage , where California is first mentioned, using a contemporary Spanish translation:

*Sabed que a la diestra mano de las Indias existe una isla llamada **California** muy cerca de un costado del Paraíso Terrenal; y estaba poblada por mujeres negras, sin que existiera allí un hombre, pues vivían a la manera de las amazonas. Eran de bellos y robustos cuerpos, fogoso valor y gran fuerza. Su isla era la más fuerte de todo el mundo, con sus escarpados farallones y sus pétreas costas. Sus armas eran todas de oro y del mismo metal eran los arneses de las bestias salvajes que ellas acostumbraban domar para montarlas, porque en toda la isla no había otro metal que el oro.*

The English translation, as it appeared in The Atlantic Monthly in March, 1864:

*Know, then, that, on the right hand of the Indies, there is an island called **California**, very close to the side of the Terrestrial Paradise, and it was peopled by black women, without any man among them, for they lived in the fashion of Amazons. They were of strong and hardy bodies, of ardent courage and great force. Their island was the strongest in all the world, with its steep cliffs and rocky shores. Their arms were all of gold, and so was the harness of the wild beasts which they tamed and rode. For, in the whole island, there was no metal but gold.*

*—Las Sergas de Esplandián, (novela de caballería)
by Garcí Rodríguez de Montalvo.
Published in Seville in 1510.*

*Recently it has been postulated that the name "California" could have come from the Spanish novel *Las Sergas de Esplandián* published in Spain in 1510 which was a fictional account of an island inhabited solely by black women (also referred to as goddesses) who devoured all men who arrived on their shores. Their island was called **California** and according to proponents of the story, this is all that is needed to prove that the novel is the source for the origins of California. We would like to see more verifiable and detailed information in order to back up this claim. We think that in this case the application of Occam's Razor is appropriate, where the simplest explanation outweighs the more complicated and outlandish theories. The fact that Cortes' travels predate the story by six years and by looking at the details of the Spanish explorer's interactions with the Aztec culture, all of which are well documented (including the linguistic roots as presented in this paper), one can conclude the word "California" naturally evolved through the intermingling of multiple cultures (i.e. Spanish and Aztec) over several centuries.*

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California "The Appearance of Home" Illustrated by Miriam Slater.

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